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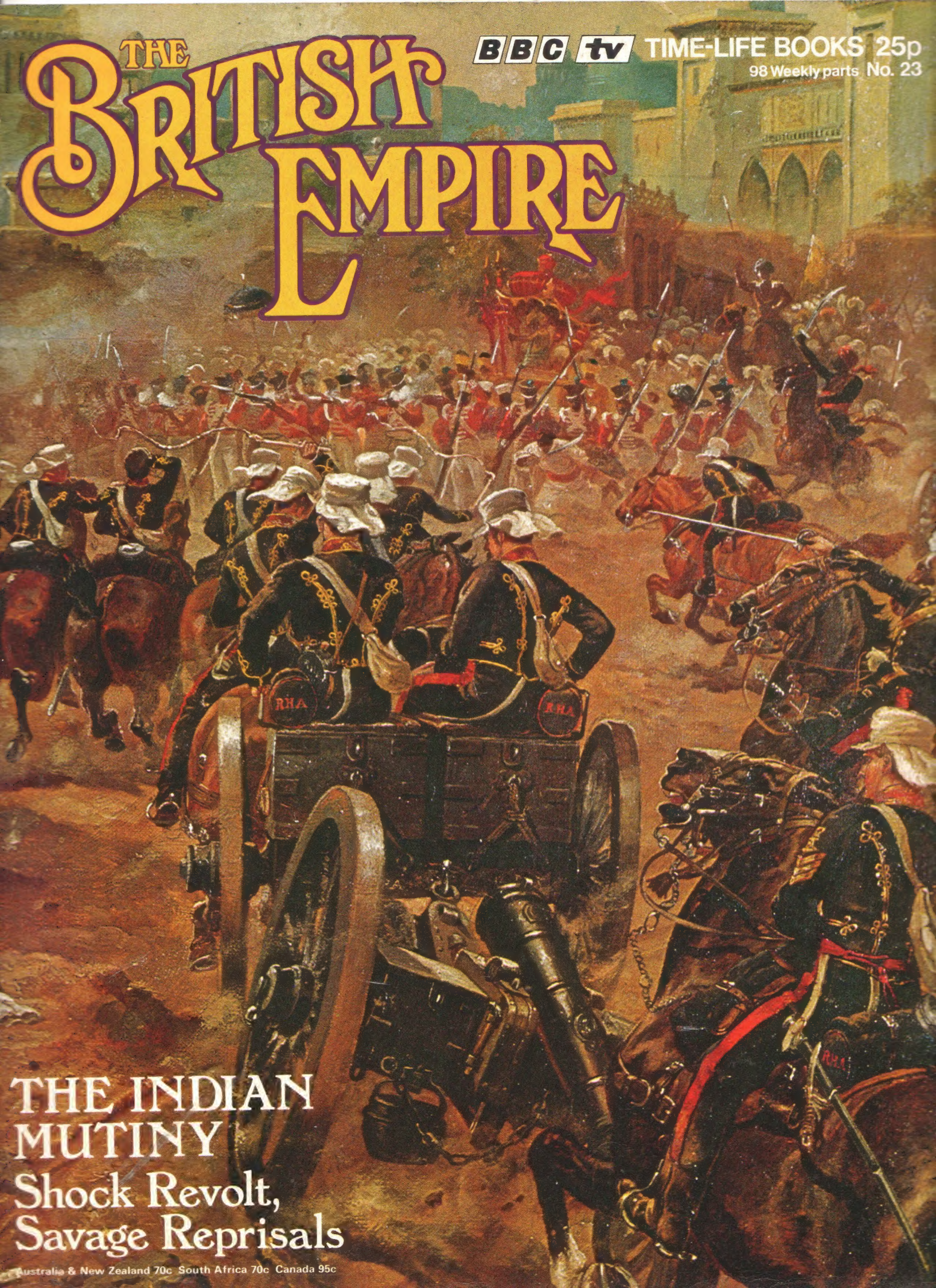

THE INDIAN MUTINY
Shock Revolt, Savage Reprisals

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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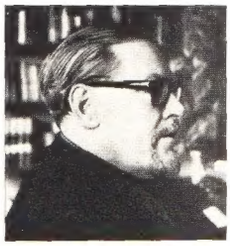

MICHAEL EDWARDES, the author of the text sections in this issue, is an authority on British India. His work *British India, 1772–1947* was the basis for a TV series entitled *Raj*. His other books include *A History of India*, *The Last Years of British India*, *Battles of the Indian Mutiny* and *Bound to Exile*, and his latest work is an assessment of East-West trade. He is also a well-known broadcaster on Asian affairs.

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BY THE WAY

Last week's column discussed the way in which the past can become suddenly accessible through the memories of the elderly. One of our authors, Roy Lewis, until recently Commonwealth Correspondent for *The Times*, tells a "believe-it-or-not" story on this theme:

It appears that the imperialist-minded historian James Anthony Froude was at a dinner-party, towards the end of the last century, at which he was sitting next to a very aged widow. The conversation turning to aspects of British history, Froude used his scholar's knowledge to let slip some hard-hitting remarks about Cromwell. "That's most interesting, Mr. Froude," remarked his elderly companion, "because my first husband's first wife's first husband knew him well, and liked him a lot." Possible? Perhaps. True? Does anyone know?

This week's issue deals with the Mutiny. The two years of the Mutiny are some of the most closely documented in 19th-Century history, yet until fairly recently, histories of the Mutiny have concentrated almost exclusively on the sufferings of the British at the hands of the Indians, rather than vice versa.

This is partly because the British compiled a mass of accessible, readable evidence emphasizing their own experiences, while the Indian sources were relatively limited and inaccessible.

But even British accounts contain much that reveals the horrific acts committed by British officers in revenge for what they regarded as a great betrayal of their trust.

These are, of course, included in recent historical accounts of the Mutiny, such as S.N. Sen's *1857*, but readers might be interested to read a small book entitled *The Other Side of the Medal* by E. Thompson, written in 1923. In it the author gathered together the various accounts of British brutality as a salutary reminder to his contemporaries that "civilized" Christian Europeans were, on occasion, as capable of cruelty as anyone else.

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For months, an inadequate force of British and sepoys preserved a precarious position outside Delhi until heavy reinforcements allowed them to take the city.

630. A Year of Bloodshed
Elsewhere, two other towns – Cawnpore and Lucknow – were centres of revolt before the start of the vengeful campaign which finally crushed the mutineers.

644. The End of the "Devil's Wind"
Queen Victoria's proclamation ends Company rule and places the government of India firmly in the hands of the Crown.

Cover: A cannon is hauled towards Lucknow in March, 1858, in the charge of the 1st King's Dragoon Guards and the Queen's Bays that ended the Mutiny in the besieged city.

THE INDIAN MUTINY

by Michael Edwardes

In the 1850s the British Army introduced a new rifle to replace the old musket affectionately known to generations of soldiers as "Brown Bess." It seemed an inoffensive and sensible step. Soldiers would no longer have to fumble with separate packets of bullets and gunpowder to charge their clumsy, muzzle-loading weapons, for with the new rifle went ammunition which combined bullet and gunpowder in one cartridge. It was welcomed everywhere – except in India. There, to the stunned amazement of the Europeans, the arrival of the cartridge set off the Indian Mutiny of 1857 – the most horrific explosion of violence in the history of the Empire.

The temper of north and central India – especially in the newly annexed kingdom of Oudh – had been tense and uneasy for some time. The situation had been reported to the Governor-General in his marble palace in Calcutta, but none of his advisers seemed to take it seriously. After all, the loyalty of the Indian soldiers – the sepoys – had never been doubted in spite of a number of mutinies and near-mutinies in the past.

Previous incidents were largely the result of the sepoys' fears that over-zealous British officers were determined to convert them to Christianity by forcing them to violate the tenets of their own religions. In 1806, the sepoys of Vellore, in southern India, had revolted because they were instructed to trim their beards, wear restyled turbans and give up caste-marks. In 1824, a sepoy regiment refused to embark for war in Burma, because travel by sea would have rendered them outcastes. Six of the ringleaders were hanged and hundreds more condemned to 14 years' hard labour on the public roads. Five others were later executed and their bodies hung in chains as an example to their followers.

There were many other factors that contributed to the general feeling of unrest among the Indians. As the East India Company had conquered India and begun to impose its own kind of government, its officials had stamped on many toes. Princes had been dispossessed of their rights and pensions, landowners found their estates confiscated because they had no written title deed to confirm their ownership of their land – this in a country where such things were unknown.

To the people who suffered the consequences there did not appear to be any justification for these acts but that of hunger for power. The dispossessed, and those who believed that their turn might come next, felt deeply aggrieved. As a result, many powerful individuals were hoping to throw the British out in order to regain lost possessions. Historians have found no evidence that the Mutiny was the result of a single centrally organized and directed conspiracy, but the various plans of which knowledge exists generally had an underlying similarity of approach – the subversion of the sepoys' loyalty by skilful exploitation of their fears as a means of toppling British rule.

But it was not only the sepoys, the great landlords and the princes who had been antagonized by the British. Ordinary people, too, had suffered. When great estates were sold up, peasants were uprooted. Taxes fell heavily on those least able to bear them. A man could not travel without having to pay a toll to cross a river. Salt, so essential in a tropical country, was a government monopoly, its price inflated by tax. Justice, through the complicated process of English law, was too costly to seek. Even oblivion was

The cartridge that sparked off rebellion.

expensive, for the government exacted its dues on opium and liquor. A traditional society, conscious that trouble was in the air, turned to traditional magic to protect itself. There was a wide sale of charms against unknown evils. Magical symbols began to appear on the walls. Prophecies were heard throughout the land. The agents of the dispossessed moved throughout the countryside, spreading rumours of great disasters to come. It was said – by whom, nobody knew – that British rule was coming to an end, and that it would happen on the one hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey, which had established British rule in Bengal on June 23, 1757.

Most mysterious of all, flat cakes of flour and water known as *chapatis* were passed from village to village. A messenger would arrive bearing them, saying that they had been brought to his own village and must be passed on. In time, the news of this strange ritual reached the British officials. What could it mean? Some argued that it was a method of carrying away disease, though there was no epidemic in 1857. When Indians were questioned, some said the distribution of *chapatis* meant that something terrible would happen, but they did not know what it might be. Others replied that they believed the *chapatis* were distributed by order of the British, and had not thought to inquire further. Whatever it meant, no one dared to disobey the summons to pass the flat cakes on to the next village, and with the *chapatis* there spread throughout the land the feeling of expectancy, of tension, of uneasiness.

Resentment of the British rule increased with feverish speed among the sepoys, especially those of Bengal, which – like Madras and Bombay, the other two presidencies, or major administrative areas of British India – had its own army. The sepoys of Bengal mostly had their homes in Oudh, a province seething with discontent since its annexation by the British in February, 1856. The Oudh sepoys had formerly had many privileges in their own country. They could, and often did, ask for and receive the British Resident's support against the native government. After annexation, the privileges disappeared and, with them, prestige. "I used to be a great man when I went home," said one Oudh cavalryman. "The best of the village rose as I approached; now the lowest puff their pipes in my face."

Fear of the British and of their inexplicable actions had prepared the sepoys to believe anything. The old order was undoubtedly being destroyed, and it was by no means improbable that the white man intended to destroy the old religion as well. The situation was explosive, and it needed only a spark to set it off. The cartridge for the new Enfield rifle was precisely this.

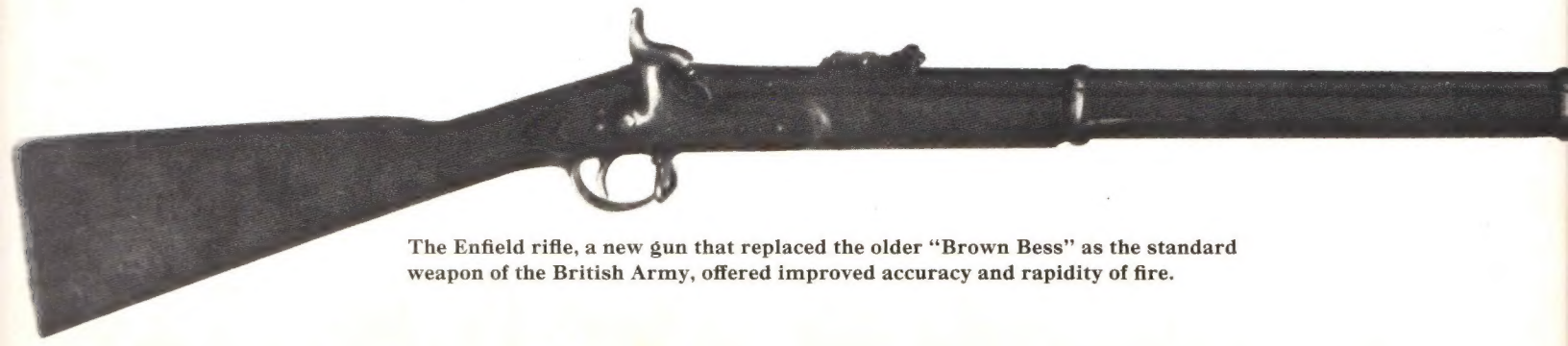
The cartridge contained both gunpowder and a bullet fixed to its base. The top of the cartridge had to be bitten or torn off so that the powder inside could be poured into the rifle. Then the bullet was rammed home, still inside the cartridge, its passage down the barrel being eased by a coating of grease round the base. Soon the rumour spread that the grease was made of cow or pig fat. The cow is sacred to the Hindu and the pig is an unclean animal to the Muslim: it seemed to the sepoys that this was yet another attempt to break their adherence to their religious traditions. It is difficult for non-Indians to understand the sepoys' response to such rumours, but whether Hindu or Muslim, they felt they were being forced into a polluting practice that threatened them with eternal damnation.

It seems highly likely that some of the cartridges were, in fact, greased with pig's or bullock's fat, though the contractors had been instructed to use mutton fat. As early as 1853, when a supply of the new cartridges had arrived from England for climate tests, Colonel Henry Tucker, Adjutant-General of the Bengal Army, had warned that unless "it be known that the grease in these cartridges is not of a nature to offend or interfere with the prejudices of caste" they should not be issued. His warning was ignored, though it had been given to the highest military authorities. When the sepoys' fears became known, at the end of January, 1857, there were suggestions that the drill should be revised. The cartridges could be torn, not bitten; the grease could be made up by the men themselves of oil and wax. But it was too late. The fear of pollution was too firmly fixed to be allayed by a reasoned response.

The fears of the sepoys were easily played upon by those who hoped to persuade them to turn their guns against the British. There were reports of nocturnal meetings in the barracks. Mysterious fires broke out: burning arrows were shot into the thatched roofs of officers' bungalows, and the telegraph station at the great military post of Barrackpore near Calcutta was burned down.

Little was done to find the culprits, even less to find out why they had acted. The incidents were reported, and the reports were passed up through various levels of authority until they ultimately arrived on the table of the Governor-General. In the highly centralized system of British administration, everything had to be committed to paper and no action could be taken until it had been approved by a higher authority. A torrential flood of paper flowed endlessly towards the Governor-General's office, silting up the channels of communication, stifling all initiative. As one 19th-Century historian of the Mutiny put it: "A letter was written where a blow ought to have been struck."

Very few, even among the most senior military officers, were prepared to bypass the system. One who did was General John Hearsey, commanding at Barrackpore. As early as the end of January, 1857 he had directly warned the Governor-General that there were persons at work deliberately creating trouble among the sepoys, and that something must be done. But even then, the system took control and delayed decision. Early in February, Hearsey decided to take action himself.

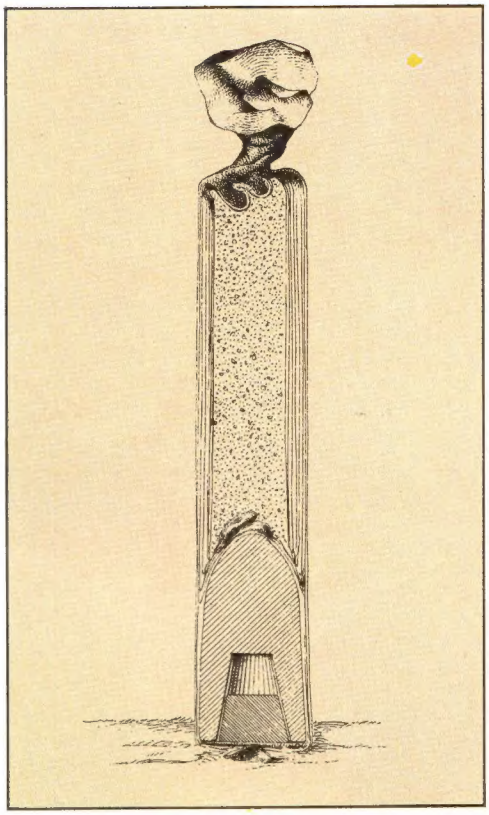


The Enfield rifle, a new gun that replaced the older "Brown Bess" as the standard weapon of the British Army, offered improved accuracy and rapidity of fire.

He ordered a parade of the sepoys at Barrackpore at which he himself would try to reassure them that the British had no designs on their religion.

Hearsey had the advantage of long service in India; in fact he had been born there. He was now 66 years of age, and his military life had been spent with the sepoys of the Company's army. He was one of the few senior officers who respected the sepoys and received, in return, their respect and affection. Though old by Indian standards, he was still strong and active, a good horseman with a commanding presence. If anyone could persuade the sepoys of the good intentions of the government it was Hearsey. He spoke to the assembled men on February 9 in their own language. His arguments were simple and fluent, and the sepoys believed him. Unfortunately, Hearsey could not speak at every military station. Too often a commander, instead of using persuasion – and, if that failed, taking decisive action – panicked.

Such was the case with a Colonel Mitchell, commanding the military station at Berhampur, some 90 miles to the north of Barrackpore. There were no European troops on the station, only the 19th Native Infantry, a squadron of native cavalry, and a battery of guns manned by sepoys. At a parade on February 27, the infantrymen refused to accept an issue of cartridges which they believed were of the new kind, though in fact they were not. Instead of attempting to reassure his men, Colonel Mitchell, hurrying to the parade ground, threatened to take the regiment to Burma or to China. The sepoys took their commander's angry threats as proof that all the rumours they had heard were true, and their discipline broke. Then Mitchell became conciliatory, for he feared that the gunners and cavalry might be equally mutinous. The sepoys returned to their duties, retaining their arms. Colonel Mitchell reported the events to Calcutta, and the system finally ground out a decision on March 23 that the 19th Native Infantry should be marched down to Barrackpore, to be disbanded under the eyes of a British regiment, Her Majesty's 87th, which was hastily brought back from Burma.

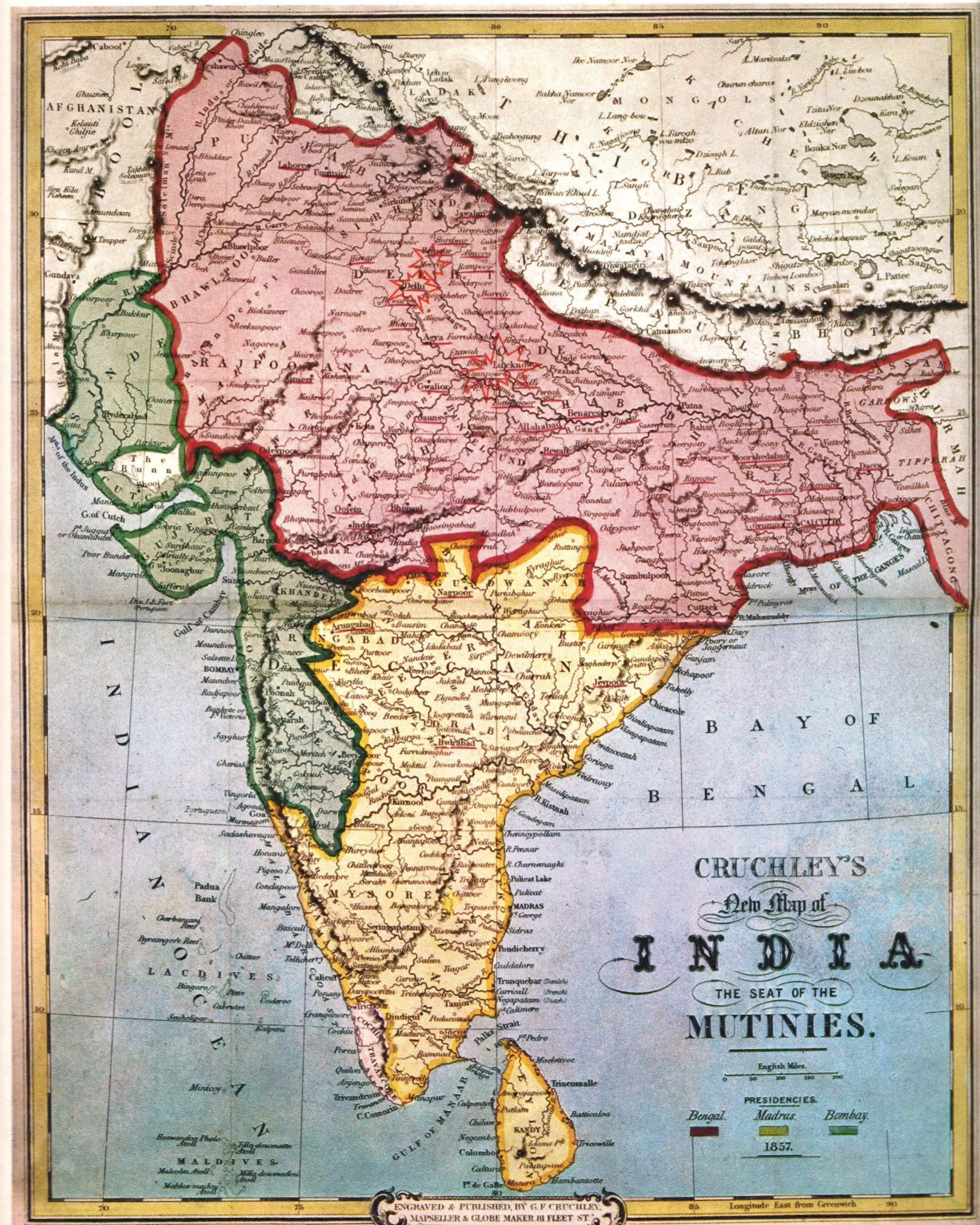


The cartridge for the Enfield rifle, shown here in actual size, was a cardboard cylinder containing gunpowder and a bullet. To open the cartridge, greased at its lower end the twist of paper was torn or bitten off.

That British troops had to be brought from such a distance merely emphasized how few there were in northern India. Most of the European troops assigned to Bengal had been moved west to secure the Punjab when it had been conquered and annexed eight years earlier. At Calcutta there was one British infantry battalion, and another was stationed 400 miles away at Dinapur. One regiment was stationed at Agra, and one at Lucknow. Altogether, in Bengal – an area as large as France and Germany combined – the British in the Company troops and the Queen's forces (lent to the Company by the Crown) amounted to only four infantry battalions and a few individual batteries of artillery. The Queen's forces had already been considerably reduced because of the demands of the Crimean War then raging between Britain and its allies against Russia. In India as a whole, there were about 40,000 Europeans in the Company and royal armies, as compared with a total strength of about 300,000 Indian soldiers.

When the news of the impending disbandment of Mitchell's command reached the sepoys at Barrackpore, their faith in the assurances of General Hearsey began to evaporate. A rumour reached the British that on March 10, when the Governor-General and the most important British officers would be attending a fête to be given by the Maharaja of Gwalior, there was to be a general uprising by the sepoys. Because of an unseasonable downpour of rain, the entertainment was cancelled. The day passed without incident, but the rumours of rebellion persisted. The Governor-General was anxious. So was General Hearsey, who decided to address the sepoys under his command once again. Among the rumours at Barrackpore was one that British troops of the 87th, due in shortly from Burma, were to make a sudden attack on the sepoys. On March 17, Hearsey once again reassured his troops: they need not fear for their caste or their religion, he said, for the Europeans were coming only to disband the mutinous 19th Native Infantry.

But the imminent punishment of the 19th – who by refusing the cartridge had steadfastly remained loyal to their faith – had already made a deep impression on Hearsey's sepoys. Nine days later, as he sat in his bungalow, Hearsey received news of a tumult on the parade ground. After sending orders to the British troops to stand by, the General rode to the scene, accompanied by his son John. A shocking sight met his eyes. A young sepoy named Mangal Pande had just cut down two European officers and was now calling on his comrades to rebel and die bravely for their religion. No one seemed to be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Nicobar Is.
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Thull Ghaut
Paulghaut
Arkaud
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Last of the Mughals

Bahadur Shah (left), the 19th – and last – emperor of the 300-year-old Mughal dynasty, was a pensioner of the East India Company who occupied himself writing Persian verse. When the Mutiny broke out, he became a tragic victim of circumstance. An unwilling pawn in the hands of the mutineers, he was unable to declare his loyalty to the British and was imprisoned by them after the fall of Delhi.

A British lady who visited the last "king of kings" in captivity provided this pathetic portrait of him: "There in a small, dirty, low room with whitewashed walls, cowered a thin, small, old man, dressed in a dirty white suit of cotton. He laid aside the hookah he had been smoking, and began salaaming to us in the most abject manner, and saying he was 'burra kooshee' (very glad) to see us." Bahadur Shah, whose name ironically derived from the Mongolian *bator* (hero) was exiled to Rangoon where he died in 1862.

taking action. In one corner stood a group of British officers, including the commander of the sepoys' regiment, all apparently struck with paralysis. One of these men called out to Hearsey: "Have a care! His musket is loaded." "Damn his musket!" replied Hearsey, and added to his son: "If I fall, John, rush in and put him to death somehow!"

As the General rode towards him, the sepoy raised his musket – then turned it on himself and pulled the trigger. But he only succeeded in wounding himself, and after being taken prisoner was court-martialled, condemned and hanged. His name lived on, for soon the cry of "Remember Mangal Pande!" was to become the Indians signal for revolt, and for the British "pandy" became a general opprobrious term for all Indians.

The 19th were disarmed and disbanded without incident at the end of March, and the Commander-in-Chief, General George Anson, saw no reason to alter the usual hot-weather routine of the army. Despite continuing reports of barracks mysteriously going up in flames and of secret meetings among the sepoys, European troops were marched to cooler stations in the foothills of the Himalayas. Officers went on leave. General Anson – who had seen no fighting since the war against Napoleon more than 40 years earlier – retired with his staff to the hill-station of Simla, nearly 1,000 miles away from the Governor-General and the civil government in Calcutta.

The officers and their families in the cool of their hill retreats had no means of knowing it, but down on the plains, in the great military cantonment of Meerut, 40 miles outside Delhi, greater troubles were brewing. There, 85 sepoys had refused to accept the new cartridge. They had been court-martialled and found guilty of disobedience and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment with hard labour. On Saturday, May 9, the whole garrison was paraded to witness the sentences being put into effect.

For one young lieutenant, Hugh Gough, who afterwards wrote a vivid account of the Mutiny outbreak, the events of that day seemed heavy with foreboding. Even the weather underlined the menace, for it was dark, with low clouds, and a hot dry wind blowing across the parade ground where some 4,000 men were drawn up to form three sides of a hollow square. The sombre light seemed to heighten the silver-grey of Gough's own 3rd Light Cavalry, the shining brass helmets and leather breeches of the Bengal Artillery officers, the black horsehair plumes of the Dragoon Guards, the olive-green of the 60th Native Rifles, and the scarlet coats and white collars of the Native Infantry.

On the fourth, open side of the square stood the 85 sepoys. They were clad in their uniforms, but their feet were bare and they carried no weapons. Their comrades, rigid at attention, carried arms, but everyone knew that their ammunition pouches were empty – by order. The British troops had their rifles, the new Enfields loaded with the cartridges that had caused all the trouble, and aimed at the Native Infantry. Gaps in their ranks showed the open mouths of guns, at each breech a gunner at the ready.

A map of India drawn soon after the Mutiny shows the four cities most affected by outbreaks of violence – Meerut, Delhi, Cawnpore and Lucknow – with the names of other disturbed areas underlined in red.

A British officer stepped forward and a ripple ran through the ranks. Slowly he read from a paper, an Indian officer translating his words into careful Hindustani. When they had finished there was silence for a moment, then a party of British soldiers moved down the file ripping the buttons from the uniforms of the 85 sepoys and the coats from their backs. Armourers with tools and shackles came forward and slowly began to fit fetters on the condemned men, many of whom had served the British government with perfect loyalty through long years and bloody battles. As the fetters were placed upon them, they lifted up their hands, beseeching the General to have mercy on them, but seeing no hope there they turned to their comrades and reproached them for standing aside and allowing them to be disgraced. Many of them were in tears, but they could do nothing in the face of the loaded field-guns and rifles, and the glittering sabres of the Dragoons. For a moment, it seemed to Lieutenant Gough as if the sepoys were about to attack the British with their bare hands; but the prisoners were marched off and the tension eased.

That evening Gough went down to the temporary jail and was deeply moved by the grief of the men who begged him to save them. Later, in the dark of the veranda, he wondered what would happen next. His thoughts were interrupted by a rustle in the darkness. It was a native officer of his own troop who had come, he said, to discuss the troops' accounts. Gough found this odd, especially as the man seemed frightened and kept carefully to the shadows. Then the real purpose of the visit was revealed. Tomorrow, Sunday, the sepoys would mutiny – all of them, even the cavalry, the sahib's own men. They would break open the jail and release their comrades. Death was planned for the white soldiers and their families.

After the man had left, Gough went to the mess and informed his colonel, George Carmichael-Smyth. His story was greeted with laughter. When he had been in India a little longer, he would learn not to take such stories seriously. But Gough was convinced that the native officer had come to warn him of a real danger. He went to the Brigadier commanding the station, Archdale Wilson, and was treated with good-natured contempt. If no one else was worried, why should Lieutenant Gough concern himself?

The next day was May 10, 1857. About 5 p.m. a rumour spread in Meerut bazaar that British troops were coming to seize the sepoys' arms. Sepoys in the bazaar hurried back to their barracks as an angry mob of villagers surged out to attack the Europeans' bungalows. On the parade ground, sepoys intent on releasing their imprisoned comrades slipped away from white officers desperately trying to control them. When Gough went out on his veranda an hour later the horizon was a sea of flame. Galloping down to the cavalry lines, he found "a thousand sepoys dancing and leaping frantically about, calling and yelling to each other and blazing away with their muskets in all directions."

By nightfall, Meerut was a city of horror. British officers had been cut down by their own men. Two officers' wives were murdered in incidents which acquired particular notoriety. One of them, a Mrs. Chambers, was pregnant; her unborn child was ripped from her womb by a local butcher. The other, a Mrs. Dawson, was recovering from smallpox; to avoid contagion, the mob threw burning torches at her until her clothes caught fire and burnt her to death.

The suddenness of the attack caught the senior officers off balance. Most were old, and had not had to fight since their youth. Though there were as many British troops in Meerut as there were Indians, and though the British had artillery, nothing was done to organize a response. Some of the younger officers – like Gough – tried to give their seniors a sense of urgency. But the mutineers were able to break open the jail, release the 85 prisoners and set off on the road to Delhi, 40 miles away to the south-west, unmolested by the British.

No one pursued them, and next morning the first of them reached the old imperial capital. Some went to the palace, the great red sandstone fort from which the Mughal emperors had ruled all India before the coming of the British. Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughal line, now called – by courtesy of the British, who paid him a pension – "King of Delhi," did not welcome the sepoys, though they hailed him, as his ancestors had been hailed, "Emperor of Hindustani." But inside the palace there were also men who had waited long for an opportunity to do something against the British who had usurped the Mughal power. They welcomed the sepoys as liberators, and all the romantic appeal of a once great native dynasty rising again was grafted on to the confused aims of the mutineers.

There was little or nothing that the few British officers and civilians in Delhi could do against the three native regiments stationed there, the mutineers from Meerut and the retainers of the King. The arsenal, one of the largest in India, was inside the city walls and guarded only by native troops. The main magazine was some three miles outside the city, having been moved there a few years earlier for added security. That, too, was guarded by native infantry. By nightfall of May 11, the Europeans in Delhi were in a bad way. Some escaped, some were prisoners in the palace, but many had been killed either by their own men or when the arsenal was blown up to prevent it from falling into the hands of the mutineers. The magazine however remained intact and was handed over to the mutineers; its 3,000 barrels of powder were saved to sustain the mutineers for three months against the forthcoming counter-attacks of the British.

Yet all was not well for the rebels inside the city. They set up an alternative government, a "Court of Mutineers," but it was torn by rivalries between the various factions. Hindus, Muslims, sepoys, civilians and Mughal princes. All treated the Emperor, who was little more than a reluctant symbol of revolt, with open contempt. He even had to threaten suicide to save his closest confidant from death. Many princes preferred to play for safety by casting their lot with the British, now belatedly gathering their forces to strike back at the rebels. It became increasingly clear that the disunited force of mutineers would have very little chance of resisting a strong counter-attack ✈

THE SIEGE OF DELHI

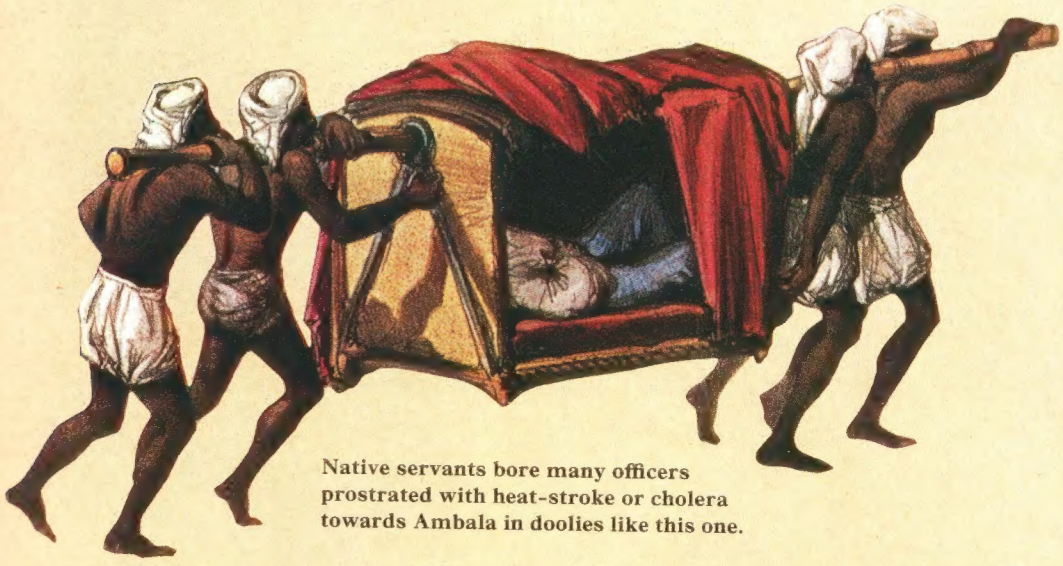
For the British to get a force moving from the searing heat of the northern plains towards rebel-occupied Delhi was a Herculean task. Officers who had taken refuge from the heat in the hills rushed down to join their units: one officer (above) even requisitioned a mail-cart. Slowed by lack of supplies and administrative incompetence, the British prepared for the four-month campaign, recorded in George Atkinson's drawings, that ended with the recapture of Delhi.

Build-up for Attack

In Ambala, 150 miles north-west of Delhi, the Commander-in-Chief, General George Anson, struggled to acquire ammunition, carts, bullocks, clothing and food. To his despair, he found himself enmeshed in military red tape. The War Departments, with their mounds of memoranda establishing precedents and routines for peacetime administration, were totally unprepared for war. Eventually, the civil administrators came to Anson's aid: local commissioners gathered 500 carts, 2,000 camels, 2,000 Indian workers and 1,000 tons of grain from the countryside and from friendly local rajahs who had refused to join the mutineers.

After a fortnight, Anson led the last British regiments out of Ambala towards Delhi. Though the army travelled mostly during the cool of the night, tempers frayed with the heat and the strain of the march. The men, according to one eyewitness, used to vent their increasingly uncontrolled hatred of Indians by torturing captured and condemned mutineers before their execution.

Troops dispatched from friendly native states to help the British provided a welcome boost to British security by deciding the hesitant local populace against joining the mutiny.



Native servants bore many officers prostrated with heat-stroke or cholera towards Ambala in doolies like this one.

Travelling by any means they could – by bullock-cart, elephant, scraggy horse or on foot – British troops made their way down from the cool hills to the scorching plains for the march to Delhi.

A raiding party of British cavalry returns victorious to a cheering camp after capturing some rebel guns outside the walls of Delhi. Such hit-and-run attacks only became possible after reinforcements arrived.

End of the Long Wait

After their 150-mile march, the British, occupied the Ridge, a two-mile strip of high ground to the north-west of Delhi. With only 600 cavalry and some 2,000 infantry, they had no hope of assaulting the 24-foot walls and beating the 30,000 rebels inside. They settled down for a long and arduous siege.

For three weary months they waited for a massive siege-train of guns and ammunition wagons on its way from the Punjab, 300 miles away to the north-west. It arrived in September under the command of John Nicholson, one of the most remarkable men in British Indian history. Imposing of stature, icy in manner, utterly confident of his ability to command respect, he was an object of terror for the Punjabis, who would threaten wayward children with the bogeyman "Nickul Seyn." With his arrival, an all-out assault was imminent.

Surprise attacks by the mutineers in Delhi demanded constant British vigilance.

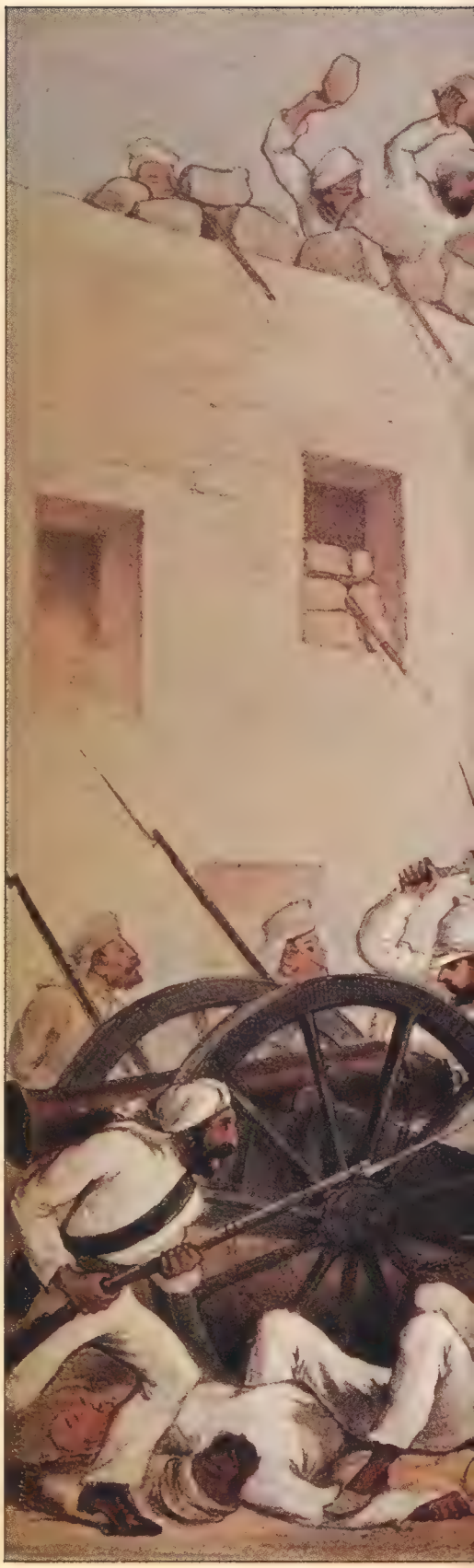
Servants prepare an evening brandy-and-soda for officers in camp. On the Ridge, natives outnumbered white men ten to one; here and elsewhere, the British seldom appreciated the extent of the native contribution to their campaign.

The "Demon of Destruction"

Three days after the arrival of the siege-train, heavy artillery began to hammer holes through the walls of the city. On September 14 the attack opened: some 5,000 British and Indian troops fought their way through the breaches under a rain of grape-shot and musket-balls. In the furious street fighting which followed, the British captured the city's liquor cellars and drunken troops ran amok in an orgy of vengeance, unable or unwilling to distinguish between mutineers and residents. A contemporary historian, T.R.E. Holmes, wrote: "Harmless citizens were shot, clasping their hands for mercy. Trembling old men were cut down."

After a week of continuous looting and skirmishing the city was won. When a salute of guns signalled the formal victory on the 21st, an officer viewing the shattered city wrote: "The demon of destruction seems to have enjoyed a perfect revel." The British had lost nearly 600 dead – including John Nicholson – in the campaign, but the first major step in suppressing the Mutiny had been taken.

On the Ridge, the British were short of ammunition and incapable of effective retaliation against Indian cannon-fire until the arrival of reinforcements and ammunition.



The British fight off one of the frequent assaults made by the mutineers before the main British offensive on Delhi.

In the narrow streets of Delhi, musket-shot, bricks and stones killed and wounded over 1,000 British on the first day of fighting alone.

II. A Year of Bloodshed

On the evening of May 12, General Anson was host to a Simla dinner-party of 25. The wine and the talk were good, and when he was handed a telegram, he set it aside under his plate. When the ladies had left the table, he opened the flimsy blue form. It was from Delhi, "We must leave office," he read. "All the bungalows are on fire, burning down by the sepoys of Meerut. They came in this morning. Mr. C. Todd is dead, we think. He went out this morning and has not yet returned. We learn that nine Europeans were killed. We are off. Goodbye." Already, two days had been lost. The telegraph was new to India and the line from Delhi went no further than Ambala, a distance of 66 miles from Simla.

The news, though it did not shock Anson into moving down into the plains himself, at least drove him into sending others. But it took time. Troops had to be rounded up from the various hill resorts. Meanwhile, the general wrote to Governor-General Canning that he awaited more information before he would proceed to Ambala. When the news came, the worst fears were confirmed.

On May 15, Anson and a force of some 6,000 men left for Ambala to organize the recapture of Delhi.

The task was formidable. Anson had the troops, but little ammunition and no transport. In an excess of economy, the army had lost its transport department some time before and had now to depend on civilian contractors. As no campaigns were ever mounted in the hot weather, much of the transport had been dispersed. As for ammunition, most of it had been stored in the great magazine at Delhi, which was thought secure.

While at Ambala, Anson was bombarded with telegrams – from the Governor-General, who ordered him to "make as short work as possible of the rebels who have cooped themselves up [in Delhi]," and from John Lawrence in the Punjab. Lawrence had himself moved ruthlessly against the rebels there. Now he wanted further action. Delhi would open its gates at the approach of British troops, he assured Anson. "Pray only reflect on the whole history of India. Where have we failed when we acted vigorously? Where have we succeeded when guided by timid counsels?"

Such advice was not a great deal of use to Anson, but he did move, with only 20 rounds of ammunition a man, and none for his artillery, without medical supplies and with no bullocks to pull the guns. The whole of the little force reached Karnal, some eight miles from Delhi, by May 30. Three days earlier, Anson had died of cholera after handing over command to Sir Henry Barnard, who had at least seen action in the Crimea. Barnard decided to march without delay, supported by a reinforcement from Meerut under Archdale Wilson. Together, they met a force of mutineers some six miles from Delhi at Badli-ke-serai. After a sharp engagement on June 8, the British put the mutineers to flight. Elated with this initial success, Barnard and his troops moved on to Delhi.

The British occupied the old military cantonments outside the city, on what was known as the Ridge. As a gesture of defiance, they burnt the barracks – and left themselves without shelter from the grinding sun which was to beat down upon them for over three months in the hottest season of the Indian year. It was soon obvious that the British were not strong enough to take Delhi. The force on the Ridge numbered about 5,000 men, while the mutineers in the city had over 30,000, a figure increasing every day as more and more reinforcements came in – brigades of cavalry and infantry, their regimental colours bearing the names of British victories flying bravely, their bands blaring British marching tunes. The British lacked not only men and guns but also dynamic leadership; heatstroke and cholera took a heavy toll. General Barnard himself succumbed early

General Havelock, who died soon after his victories at Cawnpore and Lucknow, was an austere devout man. "No doubt he is fussy and tiresome," wrote Lady Canning, the Governor-General's wife, "but his little old stiff figure looks as active and fit for use as if he were made of steel."

in July, and his successor was soon too ill to exercise command. The next senior officer was Archdale Wilson, hardly an encouraging replacement for he it was who had hesitated so fatally at Meerut.

The British had to have reinforcements and heavy artillery with which to breach the walls of Delhi, and the reinforcements could only come from the Punjab. Fortunately, there was John Lawrence who, while ensuring the safety of the Punjab, set in motion preparations for reinforcing the British outside Delhi with a massive siege-train: great guns drawn by 16 elephants and accompanied by over 500 waggons bursting with ammunition – sufficient, it was confidently stated, "to grind Delhi to powder."

In the meantime, reinforcements had been steadily arriving and, with them, some younger officers anxious for action. Among them was John Nicholson. His reputation was already high, and one officer claimed that he was "an army in himself," but he was also quite sombre and humourless, and his presence cast "a damper on the gaiety of some who sat around him" in the Mess.

Nicholson was anxious to get on with the assault. But though Nicholson and others successfully mounted a number of small engagements, there was no possibility of assaulting the city, protected as it was by seven miles of walls, until the siege-train arrived. It did so on September 4, and three days later the first breaching battery was laid against the city walls. By the evening of the 14th, the British had broken into the city but the victory required bitter fighting and many casualties.

That night the guns were quiet, but the British soldiers found and broke open the cellars of merchants dealing in European liquors. One eyewitness wrote: "A black or a green bottle filled with beer or wine or brandy was more precious than a tiara of diamonds." Most of the British force spent two days in an orgy, "utterly demoralized" wrote Captain William Hodson, "by hard work and hard drink. . . . For the first time in my life, I have had to see English soldiers refuse repeatedly to follow their officers."

When Archdale Wilson finally ordered the remaining liquor stores to be destroyed, there was still much to do in clearing the city of the remaining rebels, but by September 20, the city was in the hands of the British. The inhabitants were driven out into the countryside while the city was given over to plunder.

Meanwhile, elsewhere, the Mutiny had spread. Soon after the fall of Delhi to the mutineers, the British communities in two other cities, Lucknow and Cawnpore, in the former Kingdom of Oudh, were threatened with extinction.

Here, 250 miles south-east of Delhi, the British were faced not only with a military rebellion but with what seemed like a mass revolt. The former King of Oudh was in comfortable exile in Calcutta, but his subjects remained behind in chaos and poverty. The state forces had been disbanded and armed soldiers had turned to banditry. The thousands of servants and tradesmen who had been employed by the King were left without a livelihood. New taxes pressed heavily on the people. A new tax on the use of opium drove thousands of addicts to suicide.

During April, the British in Lucknow had made preparations for the coming crisis. In charge was Sir Henry Lawrence, brother of John. Under his guidance, the Residency was fortified. It stood to the north of the city on a raised plateau backing on to the River Gumti, and contained a number of buildings, offices and bungalows. All round this area were mosques and houses which overlooked the defences, giving fine vantage-points for would-be attackers. Despite requests by his officers, Lawrence refused to demolish the Indian buildings. From any sound military viewpoint, then, the Residency was almost indefensible.

When the news of the outbreak at Meerut reached Lucknow, the situation immediately became dangerous. Buildings were set on fire, and armed Indians began to gather in the city and to attack European positions. By early June, the thin web of British rule had been broken. "Every outpost, I fear, has fallen," wrote Lawrence on June 12, "and we daily expect to be besieged by the confederated mutineers and their allies."

Forty-two miles away at Cawnpore, another garrison was already fighting for its life. Cawnpore was the headquarters of the command that covered Oudh. In charge was Major-General Sir Hugh Wheeler. A man in his early seventies, he had served in India for 54 years – and none of them had prepared him for what he was now to face. Cawnpore was a large station, with many European and Eurasian families. To protect them Wheeler had only 60 European artillerymen, on whom he could rely absolutely. The rest of his troops were Indian, and there were a large number of them.

There were two possible strong points. One was the magazine, which contained large stocks of weapons and ammunition. It stood only a little way from the river, which could have been used for a get-away in an emergency. The other consisted of two barrack buildings in the open, well away from the river, near the main road from Allahabad. The barracks, which had no defences, were chosen and surrounded by an inadequate entrenchment, though to a competent soldier the disadvantages of the position should have been obvious.

Near Cawnpore, in the town of Bithur, lived a man known as the Nana Sahib. The Nana was the adopted son of a prince who, after defeat by the British, had been settled in luxurious exile at Bithur. For 33 years the British paid the Prince a lavish pension; but when he died in 1851 they refused to continue paying it to his adopted son. To Nana's appeals the government turned a deaf ear. The Nana, living in indolence and luxury in his palace – even financing his own body of troops – bided his time. No one seemed to suspect that he might harbour a deep grudge against the British. He remained on the friendliest terms with the British and, in particular, with General Wheeler and his Indian wife. It is probable that the General asked his advice and received an assurance that, should the sepoys mutiny, they would make for Delhi and leave the British in Cawnpore alone. Certainly, Wheeler trusted the Nana implicitly; after deciding on the barracks as his own defensive position, the General invited him to take over the magazine and the Treasury with his household troops!

The Nana occupied these two points

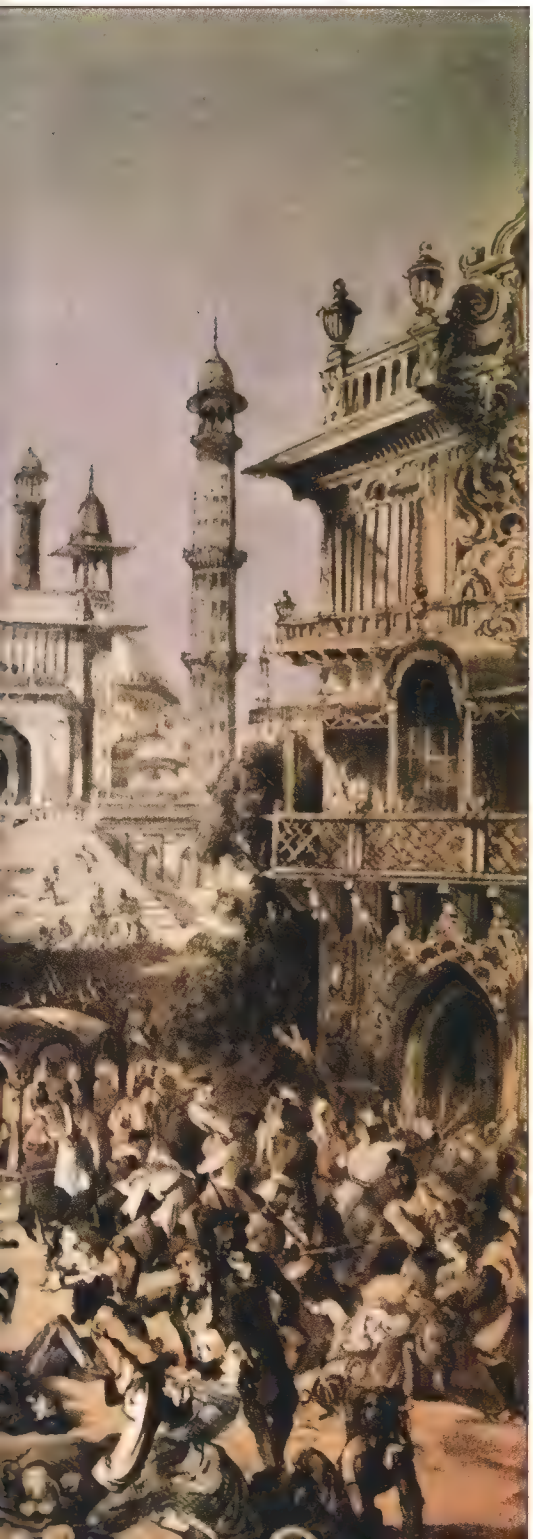
and waited. On the night of June 4 nearly all of the sepoys mutinied, burning their barracks before looting the Treasury. Some of those who did not do so joined Wheeler inside the entrenchment. The mutineers – as the Nana had foretold – left for Delhi. Wheeler felt that all he had to do was wait for reinforcements, which he expected at any moment. He was soon disillusioned. The sepoys had halted only a few miles up the road.

On June 6, Wheeler received a letter from the Nana Sahib saying that he intended to attack the entrenchment. Within a few hours the area was surrounded by the rebels, and the guns from the magazine that Wheeler had handed over to his friend were dropping round-shot on the barracks. Behind a feeble rampart four feet high and made of loose earth were 240 men and 375 women and children. The sun was at its hottest, gun-barrels burned the hand that held them, and there was little or no protection – though about 60 years later a huge underground room was discovered below the barracks that would have given cool and bullet-proof protection. Unaware of its existence, the garrison was protected from the mutineers' heavy artillery fire only by shallow trenches.

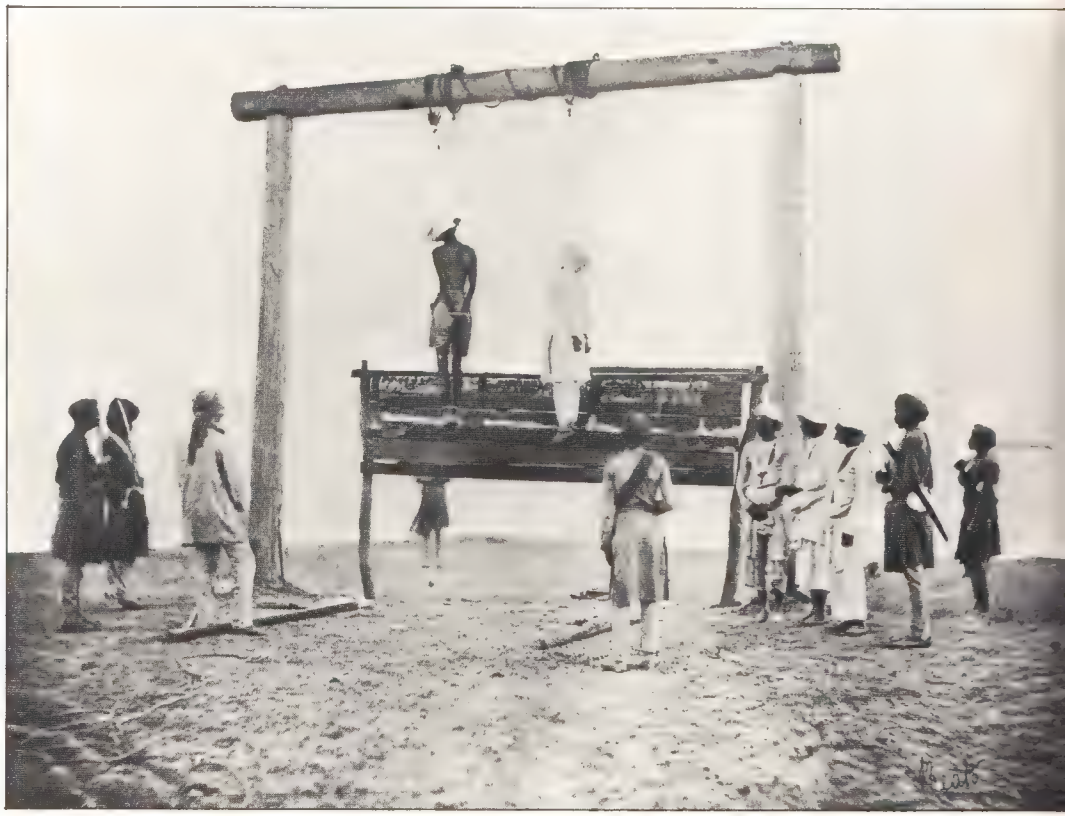
The death-roll among the defenders grew steadily. On June 23, the anniversary of the Battle of Plassey, a great assault was beaten off. But food and water were scarce, and the route to the well was open to heavy fire from the mutineers. By June 25 the ammunition was almost gone and starvation confronted the garrison in the face. There was no sign of relief, but on the same day the Nana offered terms of surrender. Wheeler himself was opposed to

continued on p. 634

Indian mutineers, seen below at Cawnpore, slaughter British women and children and toss them down a canopied well (right), while other rebels fire on the men in the boats (left). In fact, the two attacks seen below did not happen simultaneously: the 211 women and children were murdered in the House of Ladies a fortnight after the men were attacked.



After the relief of the city the bloodstained shambles in the House of Ladies was left untouched for days as a horrifying reminder to the British of Indian cruelty.



Two mutineers pay for their crimes while several of their countrymen who remained loyal to the British supervise the punishment. Hanging was a particularly obnoxious form of execution to the Hindu because the hangman (third from left) was usually an outcaste.

surrender, but others thought that some attempt should be made to save the women and children.

A written treaty was drafted and accepted, by which the British were to surrender their guns and treasure and then march out of the entrenchment with their hand-arms and 60 rounds of ammunition for each man. The Nana was to provide boats to transport the women, the children and the sick.

On June 27 what remained of the garrison marched out towards the landing-stage. The sick and the women were carried out in palanquins, and the children who could not walk were carried by some of the sepoys who had been trying to kill them a few days before. By 9 a.m. all were embarked in large clumsy vessels with thatched roofs which looked, from a distance, "rather like floating haystacks." Suddenly, and without warning, a shot was heard. Fearful of treachery, and with nerves tattered by three weeks of siege, the British immediately opened fire. The Nana's men replied with grapeshot and ball, and the little fleet was soon ablaze. One boat succeeded in getting away, and four of its occupants finally reached safety.

Of those who survived this last battle, the men – 60 in number – were killed by the Nana's troops; the women and children were first imprisoned in a large house and later moved to a smaller one built by an English officer for his native mistress (hence its name, Bibighur, meaning "House of Ladies"). On July 15, news reached Cawnpore that the British were approaching the city. Nana Sahib ordered all the remaining prisoners to be killed. His motives for doing this remain obscure. Perhaps it was out of blind rage, perhaps to rid himself of those who might give evidence against him, perhaps in the extraordinary belief that the approaching forces would then have no remaining motive to press home their assault in order to rescue their imprisoned countrymen.

Towards evening, five British men – fugitives from elsewhere captured over the past few days – were taken out and shot. Then a party of sepoys was detailed off to execute the 210 women and children. Apparently unable to bring themselves to commit such cold-blooded murder, they fired high. Butchers were then summoned from the bazaar and together with two or three of the Nana's troops went in to finish the job with knives. It was not efficiently done. A few were still alive in the morning, among them some children, saved perhaps, by the crush of bodies in the darkness. In the morning, the victims were dragged out and thrown down a near-by well. Some sepoys said the children still alive were killed first, others that they were tossed alive into the well.

Such at least, is the tale that emerged

Gunners await the order to blast mutineers from cannons. This was a traditional method of execution in India, but its adoption by the British shocked Western nations. In this American drawing, the mutineers, their hair cut into scalp-locks, look more like Red Indians than sepoys.

from the often contradictory evidence after the Mutiny. But although the details have never been substantiated, the fact of the final massacre was indisputable, and it was this atrocity above all which inflamed British feelings when the relief forces under General Henry Havelock arrived to begin the assault on Cawnpore two days later.

The recapture of Cawnpore was the first stage on the way to relieving the Residency at Lucknow. The 2,000 troops, racked by dysentery, cholera and heat-stroke, took ten days to advance the 100 miles from Allahabad to Cawnpore. When they entered the town, on the 17th, they still hoped to bring release to the women and children imprisoned there. Instead they found a slaughter-house. "I am not exaggerating," wrote one officer, "when I tell you that the soles of my boots were more than covered with the blood of these poor wretched creatures." Blood-stained clothing was scattered about, as well as leaves ripped out of the Bible and out of another appropriately titled book, *Preparation for Death*.

The British left the room untouched, and filled in the well only partially, so that they could stand as terrible reminders to new troops from England that their duty must be sustained by a desire for revenge. One soldier, his head full of tales of atrocities, reported: "I seed two Moors [Indians] talking in a cart. Presently I heard one of 'em say 'Cawnpore.' I knowed what that meant; so I fetched Tom Walker, and he heard 'em say 'Cawnpore,' and he knowed what that meant. So we polished 'em both off."

Revenge was not confined to ignorant soldiers. At Cawnpore, Brigadier-General James Neill issued an order on July 25 that every captured rebel, whether proved guilty or not, "will be taken down to the house and will be forced to clean up a small portion of the bloodstains. The task will be made as revolting to his feelings as possible. . . . After properly cleaning up his portion, the culprit will be immediately hanged." The guilty men, of course, had fled long before Neill arrived. Neill proudly reported that "a Mohammedan officer of our civil court, a great rascal" had objected. He was flogged, and "made to lick up part of the blood with his tongue." Then, in Old Testament terms expressing the fanatical desire for vengeance which infected many British, Neill concluded: "No doubt this is a strange law, but it suits the occasion well, and I hope I shall not be interfered with until the room is thoroughly cleansed in this way. . . . I will hold my own, with the help and the blessing of God. I cannot help seeing that His finger is in all this – we have been false to ourselves so often."

"Above the smoke you saw legs, arms and heads flying in all directions," wrote one British eyewitness to the event, and added: "such is the force of habit we now think little of it."

Neill's ferocity was not exceptional. The British, enraged by the murder of their women and children in Cawnpore and elsewhere, were already responding with a reign of terror. By the middle of June, 1857, they had begun what one 19th-Century historian of the Mutiny, J.W. Kaye, called a "Bloody Assize." Indiscriminate lynchings were commonplace. "Volunteer hanging parties," wrote Kaye, "went out into the districts, and amateur executioners were not wanting to the occasion. One gentleman boasted of the numbers he had finished off quite 'in an artistic manner,' with mango trees for gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims of this wild justice being strung up, as though for pastime, in the form of figures of eight."

Hanging, however, was usually thought too good for mutineers. When the facilities were available, it was usual to blow them from guns. It was claimed that this method contained "two valuable elements of capital punishment; it was painless to the criminal and terrible to the beholder." The ritual was certainly hideous. With great ceremony, the victim was escorted to the parade ground while the band played some lively air. The victim's back was ranged against the muzzle of one of the big guns and he was strapped into position. Then the band would fall silent and the only sound would be the faint crackle of the portfire, as it was lowered to the touch-hole. With a flash and a roar, an obscene shower of blood and entrails would cover both the gunners and observers.

While Neill was engaged on his personal vengeance at Cawnpore, Havelock set out for Lucknow. He was, however, opposed not only by large bodies of mutineers, but also by heat-stroke and disease. Though he was victorious in a number of engagements, his troops were too weak to follow up their successes, and

Sir Colin Campbell (right) leader of the Lucknow relief expedition, was so cautious and painstaking in his preparations for attack that he was known as "Sir Crawling Camel."

twice he was forced to fall back on Cawnpore. There he was able to regain sufficient strength to defeat, on August 16, a large force of mutineers who attempted to retake the city. But reinforcements arrived, and on September 19 Havelock was at last able to set out once again to relieve the long besieged people in the Lucknow Residency.

Inside the Residency, the garrison – some 1,800 British men, women and children, as well as 1,200 native soldiers and non-combatants – had been holding out against a force of well over 20,000 Indian mutineers.

The siege had been precipitated by an ill-advised attempt by Sir Henry Lawrence to destroy a body of rebels at a place some ten miles from the Residency on June 29. The sortie had ended in a rout, and Lawrence had been compelled to retire on the Residency area before all his preparations there were complete. On the following day, he withdrew the garrison from the Machchi Bhawan, blowing up 240 barrels of gunpowder and five million rounds of ammunition when they left to keep these supplies from falling into the hands of the Indians.

The defence of the Residency was a nightmare. Because of Lawrence's refusal to demolish the mosques and houses surrounding the area, the defenders were under fire from the near-by rooftops, suffering from what the military commander, Colonel Inglis, described as "our very tenderness to the religious prejudices and respect to the rights of our rebellious citizens and soldiery."

Henry Kavanagh, a clerk, disguised himself as a native and carried a message from Lucknow through enemy lines. For this feat he received a rarely-awarded civilian V.C.

Casualties were high. The deadly sniper fire was soon supplemented by heavy artillery. On July 1 a shell burst in the room occupied by Lawrence. On being pressed to move to a safer place he replied

Sir Robert Napier (left) who devised the plan for the capture of Lucknow, relaxes with one of his men outside a bungalow.

that he "did not believe that the enemy had an artilleryman good enough to put another shell into that small room." He was wrong. About 8 a.m. the next day, while he lay exhausted on his bed, there was "a sheet of flames and a terrific report." To the cry from one of his aides, "Sir Henry, are you hurt?" he replied "I am killed." His pain dulled by chloroform, Lawrence survived for two days. In his conscious periods he dictated orders and requested that on his tomb should be placed the simple inscription: "Here lies Henry Lawrence who tried to do his duty. May God have mercy on him." In the night of July 4 he was buried with other dead in a large pit.

At least the men of the garrison had their duties. But the women and children were confined to the cellars, and lived a terrible, separate life punctuated only by alarms and deaths. Food was rationed, each person receiving "attar or flour, which we made into chupatties; rice, dhal or peas; salt and meat." There were no proper cooking facilities so everything was cooked together, with ship's biscuits and some water, into a stew. "But as the saucepan was of copper and could not be relined during the siege, the food when it was turned out was often perfectly green – hunger alone could make it enjoyable." The children suffered most. The heat was intense and there were no coolies to pull the punkah fans. When the besiegers attacked the Residency, all the lights had to be put out and the children lay trembling in the darkness until the defenders had routed the Indians.

The rebels in Oudh had few military leaders of any quality, but among the civilians there was a woman of strong character and sense of purpose. The Begum Hazrat Mahal, who had begun her career as a dancing-girl, had caught the eye of the King of Oudh and borne him a son. After the rising in Oudh, the sepoys approached a number of the ex-King's concubines to persuade them to put up one of their sons as king. All refused until it came to the turn of Hazrat Mahal. She immediately agreed that her ten-year-old son, Birjis Qadr, should be proclaimed King and that she should be Regent during his minority. William Howard Russell – correspondent of the London *Times* – noted in his diary: "This Begum exhibits great energy and ability. She has excited all Oudh to take up the interests of her son, and the chiefs have sworn to be faithful to him."

A "government" was formed under Hazrat Mahal's authority and proclamations were made over the seal of King Birjis Qadr. The Begum toured through Oudh and was in constant correspondence with other leaders of the rebels. Little of this was known inside the Residency, for news was hard to come by. But a native spy was several times able to make his way through the rebel forces to Havelock's camp; and on September 23 a letter came from Sir James Outram, who had been sent to supersede Havelock but instead volunteered to serve under him until Lucknow was relieved. In his letter Outram informed the commander

of the garrison that the relieving force would be there in a few days.

On September 25, after bloody fighting, Havelock battered his way through to the Residency. "The half-famished garrison," wrote Havelock, "contrived to regale me, not only with beef cutlets, but with mock turtle soup and champagne." But Havelock and Outram could do nothing in return. The force they had brought to Lucknow was not strong enough to break out again.

Reinforcements, however, were by now arriving in India in ever-increasing numbers. With them came two generals who were to bring the campaign against the mutineers to an end – Sir Colin Campbell and Sir Hugh Rose. On November 9, Campbell advanced with 5,000 men on Lucknow. To guide him, Outram sent Henry Kavanagh, who had volunteered to make his way through the rebel lines disguised as an Indian. It seemed a foolhardy enterprise, as he was nearly six feet tall, with red-gold hair and beard, and blazing blue eyes. But, made up with lampblack, he succeeded in reaching Campbell. On November 16, Campbell entered the city. He had moved slowly, careful not to risk unnecessary lives, but his caution – commendable in itself – proved self-defeating because he allowed his enemy to escape time and again, and the campaign was prolonged.

Campbell slowly cleared the city of rebel forces as the garrison in the Residency made preparations for the evacuation. As the early darkness descended on November 19, the sad remnant of the garrison marched out. Campbell made no attempt to hold the city. He did not have the troops, and there were more pressing calls; at Cawnpore he had left General Windham with only 500 men to guard the one bridge by which mutineers fleeing from Lucknow might cross the River Ganges. Outram and Havelock were left, with 4,000 men, in a walled park four miles from Lucknow. There, weak with dysentery, Havelock waited for death. "For 40 years," he told Outram, "I have so endeavoured to rule my life that when death came I might face it without fear." It came on the morning of November 24.

Campbell's weary men hurried towards Cawnpore, hampered by the women and children who were refugees from Luck-

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The red-coated Queen's Bays lead the British cavalry charge on Lucknow. Sir Colin Campbell

relief forces amounted to over 20,000 men and 180 guns, the largest number of British troops ever to take the field in India in the 19th Century.

now. Windham, faced by a rebel force of some 20,000 men under the command of the best of the rebel generals, Tantia Topi, reluctantly had had to give ground. But with Campbell's arrival, the British took the offensive, routed Tantia Topi and saved Cawnpore.

The campaign was by no means over. It was three months before Campbell could retake Lucknow in March 1858, and it was not until May, with the successful action at Bareilly in Rohilkhand, that large-scale operations in the north came to an end.

The fall of the two great centres of the revolt, Delhi and Lucknow, marked the beginning of the end, and many mutineers realized it. The civilian leaders of the Mutiny disappeared, some never to be heard of again. Those who had taken advantage of the breakdown of British rule to pay off old scores or acquire an easy fortune faded into the background from which they had emerged. Only a few, like the Rani of Jhansi and Tantia Topi, fought on to the end alongside their sepoy followers who – as the British had made clear – stood as much chance of death if they surrendered as if they went on fighting to the bitter end.

While Campbell completed his campaign in Oudh, Sir Henry Rose turned on the rebels in central India.

Rose, starting from Bombay, made for Jhansi, which he reached on March 21. Before he could besiege the citadel, he had to march out against Tantia Topi, who had recovered from his defeat by Campbell. Once more the Indian was defeated and Rose could return to the storming of Jhansi. Even though the British guns had continued to bombard the city while Rose was away dealing with Tantia Topi, it still looked formidable. The great fort seemed untouched and the Rani's flag still flew defiantly from one of the towers. This remarkable woman, only 23 years old, had been a reluctant rebel. She took up arms after the British accused her of leading a massacre of white women and children. Although there is no evidence of her complicity in the deed, she was condemned by the British as the "Jezebel of India" and chose to fight. But without hoped-for support from Tantia Topi, the plight of the city was serious.

The interior of the Sikanderbagh, an enclosed courtyard in the city of Lucknow, is littered with

scattered remains of over 2,000 rebels slaughtered there after the British recaptured the city.

When the British launched their assault, they were met with strong resistance but finally broke through the walls into the city. No quarter was given by the British, even to women and children. Those of the rebels who could not escape, wrote an eyewitness, "threw their women and babes down wells and then jumped down themselves." The fighting went on for some days, until the streets were so full of corpses that all the squares were turned into cremation grounds and "it became difficult to breathe, as the air stank with the odour of burning human flesh and the stench of rotting animals in the streets." The British claimed to have killed 5,000 "rebels" in the town, but many must have been innocent citizens.

The Rani was not among the dead. On April 4, she and a small party had left the fort and made for the north gate of the city. Passing through, she avoided Rose's patrols and was many miles away before the British discovered she had gone. A cavalry detachment, sent in pursuit, caught up with the party, and according to some sources the British officer commanding was wounded in a sword-fight by the Rani herself. The Rani and four retainers reached the town of Kalpi the next day, and were joined there by Tantia Topi. Rallying their forces, they descended on Gwalior, an immense fortress held by a ruler loyal to the British. The ruler marched out against the rebels, but his army deserted to them and he himself barely escaped capture.

Rose and his exhausted troops took Gwalior on June 20. Among those who fell in the fighting was the Rani of Jhansi, dressed as a man, her great jewelled sword still in her hand. Tantia Topi escaped, only to be betrayed to the British; he was hanged in April, 1859.

Peace in India was not officially declared until July 8, 1859. "War is at an end; Rebellion is put down; the Noise of Arms is no longer heard where the enemies of the State have persisted in their last Struggle; the Presence of large Forces in the Field has ceased to be necessary; Order is re-established; and peaceful Pursuits have everywhere been resumed." So ran Lord Canning's proclamation. The British in the subcontinent and at home began to breathe freely once again.

A family, helped by still-faithful Indian servants, flees the blazing town of Lucknow (background). The calm English faces and the presence of two angelic children are nicely calculated to give the picture the right degree of sentimental appeal dear to art patrons of the time.

British in Lucknow, stoically ready for death, receive new hope from a woman who has heard the bagpipes of Havelock's advancing Highlanders.

A Heritage of Anger

Before the Mutiny, most Englishmen at home were blissfully untouched by the problems of British rule in India, for there was a widespread belief that British blood carried with it some divine warrant for the art of peaceful government. When the Mutiny destroyed this comfortable illusion, public reaction was one of righteous indignation, as if the Indians were children who had betrayed a long-suffering, self-sacrificing parent. A wave of bitterness swept the country.

For years, the Mutiny held a morbid fascination for the British, as if it was an epic tragedy which had somehow purged them of evil. "We were indebted to India," wrote one civil servant, "for the Great Mutiny which has well been called the Epic of the Race." Tennyson grandiosely conjured up the Banner of England "flying at top of the roofs in the ghastly siege of Lucknow." Painters portrayed visions of horror, deception and murder, with fragile, suffering English ladies and their flaxen-haired babes fleeing from lecherous, goggle-eyed Indians. Their pictures were overwhelmingly heroic or religious in tone, and the innocent victims were depicted as saintly and resigned in the face of some unfathomable catastrophe.

A youthful soldier, homeward bound with other veterans of the Mutiny, shows off the Victoria Cross he won for his bravery.

III. The End of the "Devil's Wind"

There had been no real danger that British rule in India would be overthrown. The majority of the native soldiers had remained loyal. In fact, without them the British could hardly have suppressed the rebellion. During the attack on Delhi, for example, of 11,200 combatants on the British side no fewer than 7,900 had been Indian. Large areas of the country remained unruffled by what the Indians called "the devil's wind."

Though the British lost at most about 11,000 men, three-quarters of them killed by disease or heat-stroke, the overall cost was high. There are no reliable figures for sepoy or civilian deaths, but many thousands, both guilty and innocent, had perished. The scars of the rebellion were there for all to see. Ruined cities, burnt villages and dead fields ran like a swathe across northern India. The country was further burdened by a debt of £30,000,000 and all the problems of reconstruction. In Britain, the Mutiny did more than produce a wave of hysteria and a desire for vengeance: it convinced the politicians that the British Crown must assume full responsibility from the East India Company for the government of India. This was done by Royal proclamation on November 1, 1858.

One of the first problems which had to be tackled was the reorganization of the army. The Company's white troops were disbanded (and some of the men mutinied in protest). Henceforth there was to be a permanent garrison of British Army troops serving only in India. Regiments of the Queen's forces would do tours of duty and then be replaced. The problem of the Indian element in the army was much more difficult. But two innovations were essential: the proportion of native to British troops was not to be allowed to exceed two to one, and the artillery was to be almost exclusively in the hands of the Queen's regiments. In the Bengal Army, the number of native infantry regiments was reduced from 146 in 1857 to 72, and similar reductions took place in the Bombay and Madras armies. The number of men in each regiment was also reduced to 600. By 1861, there were about 70,000 British troops to 135,000 native troops, and the British held all the arsenals and the principal forts.

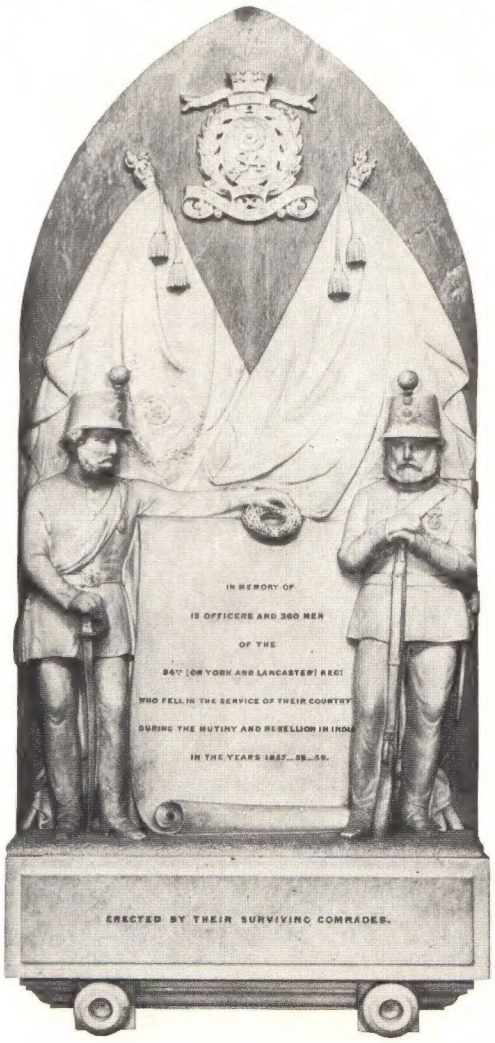
The main task of civil reconstruction took many years. The first step was an attempt at reconciliation. The princes, who had generally either sided with the British or had been neutral, were no longer threatened with annexation. Over the years that followed the Mutiny, every attempt was made to show them that their true interests lay with the British, and everything was done to give them a position – albeit empty of real power – in the new Empire of India. Recognizing that one of the causes of the Mutiny had been the fear that the British intended to make all Indians Christians, Queen Victoria proclaimed categorically that, though "firmly relying ourselves upon the truth of Christianity and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any other subjects."

Only one of the rebel leaders replied to the Queen's proclamation. The Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh, refusing the offer of a pardon and a pension, stayed in Nepal, to which she had escaped, and from there issued her reply. The Begum's "proclamation" is an unusual document. It dissected Queen Victoria's text, paragraph by paragraph, and in its rather prolix way it enshrines the fears and misunderstandings that led to the sepoy revolt. Her criticism of the clause guaranteeing freedom of religious worship is worth quoting, for behind it lies the truth of the tragedy of 1857:

"In the proclamation it is written that the Christian religion is true, but no other creed will suffer oppression, and that the laws will be observed towards all. What has the administration of justice to do with the truth or falsehood of a religion? That religion is true which acknowledges one God and knows no other. Where there are three gods in a religion, neither Mussulman nor Hindus – nay, not even Jews, sun-worshippers or fire-worshippers – can believe it to be true. To eat pigs and drink wine, to bite greased cartridges, and to mix pig's fat with flour and sweetmeats, to destroy Hindu and Mussulman temples on pretence of making roads, to build churches, to send clergymen into the streets and alleys to preach the Christian religion, to institute English schools, and pay people a monthly stipend for learning the English Sciences, while the places of worship of Hindu and Mussulman are to this day neglected – with all this how can the people believe that religion will not be interfered with? The rebellion began with religion, and for it millions of men have been killed. Let not our subjects be deceived; thousands were deprived of their religion in the north-west and thousands were hanged rather than abandon their religion."

What, then, had the revolt been? Was it merely a military mutiny in a part of the army, as the British believed, or a national uprising, as later Indian historians have argued? The truth lies somewhere in between. It was traditional India that had risen against the British, the India which remembered its past, hated the present, and dreaded the future – the future that was now absolutely certain to belong to the Westernized Indian, and not to soldiers or princes.

This memorial in York Minster is one of the thousands erected throughout Britain to honour the soldiers who died in the Mutiny.



H.M.S. Hannibal, 1855

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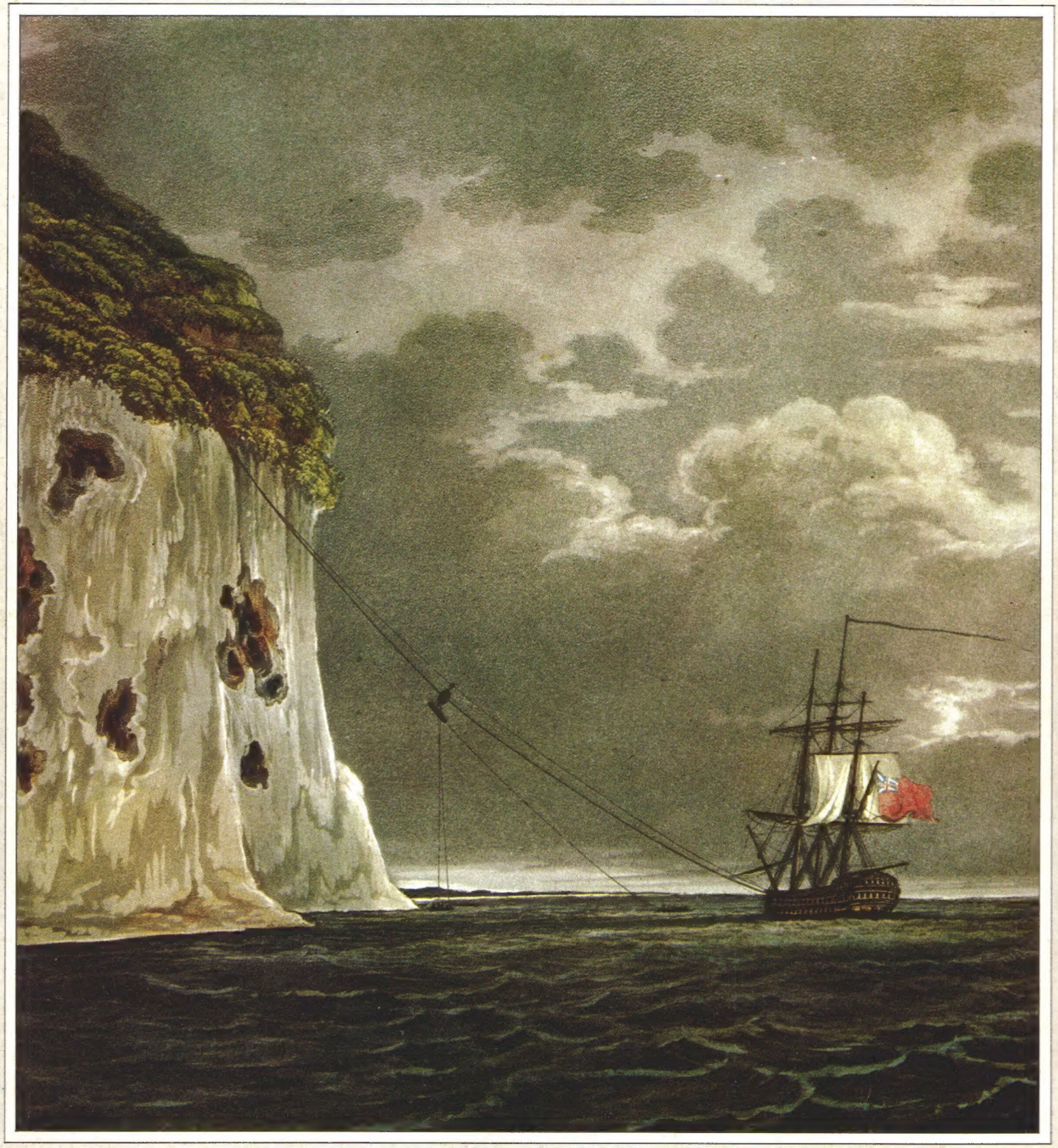

SPECKS UPON THE SEA
A SCATTER OF IMPERIAL ISLANDS